ACTION COMMITTEE ON THE RURAL ECONOMY

Phase II: Final Report

May 2005

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MESSAGE FROM THE ACRE CO-CHAIR

Since our first meeting in 2000, ACRE members have invested a lot of time and energy examining the rural economy. In our first phase of work, we made 185 recommendations to the provincial government on various aspects of the rural economy. Since then, many of these recommendations have been implemented, and we have seen positive change in rural Saskatchewan. We believe the Province is making progress toward a revitalized, vibrant rural economy.

The release of our *Supplementary Recommendations* in July 2003 brought the first phase of ACRE's work to a close. In our second phase of work, we have focused on the areas of business development, rural employment, Crown land, and rural infrastructure.

In the course of developing these new recommendations, we spent many hours consulting with stakeholders, listening to participants at public meetings across rural Saskatchewan, and receiving feedback on the first draft of our Phase II Report. We have spent many hours on the telephone discussing controversial aspects of our draft reports with rural residents. While not all of the comments we received were positive, we believe it is important for rural residents to have an opportunity to discuss the issues that will impact the future of rural Saskatchewan, and we are proud that we have been able to raise these questions in the public arena. We appreciate all of the comments and concerns that rural residents have brought forward. As a result of our consultations, we have made several revisions to our draft report, and are pleased to present our Phase II Final Report to the Government of Saskatchewan.

Audrey Horkoff

ACRE Co-Chair

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Stakeholder feedback

Throughout this publication, you will see feedback ACRE received from each of our six consultation meetings. Consultations were held in Canwood, Carlyle, Swift Current, Tisdale, Unity and Yorkton, and drew attendees from dozens of communities across the province. The statements preceeded by the above symbol were given by attendees at these meetings. All feedback was considered in the creation of our Phase II recommendations.

FEEDBACK

There are a lot of things that rural communities can do. We live and sleep outside the box. … When things have to be done, we find a way to make them work.

-Carlyle

Executive Summary

ACRE's second phase of work was comprised of two major components. Our first task has been to monitor the Province as it implements its *Rural Strategy*. We are continuing to do that by regularly meeting with the Minister of Rural Development, and by paying attention to the Province's responses to our original recommendations.

Our second task has been to continue to examine areas of the rural economy and make recommendations. We chose to do this in the same way we worked through Phase 1, through subcommittees that could take time to examine issues in detail, meet with many stakeholders, and discuss potential ideas. After meeting to strategize and to consider which areas of the rural economy required further study after our first phase of work, ACRE members decided to form four subcommittees. These subcommittees spent over a year researching, consulting, and deliberating. This summary provides only the recommendations put forward in ACRE's Phase II Final Report. Background information about each of these recommendations is included in the body of this document, and in the full reports prepared by each of the four subcommittees.

FEEDBACK

I think we have got to realize that change is always going to offer us opportunity and opportunity is good.

-Unity

ACRE'S PHASE II RECOMMENDATIONS

ACRE's Business Development Subcommittee

BD1) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan work with the Government of Canada and with municipal governments in Saskatchewan, to create a Task Force that will:

a) examine the programs and services offered for rural economic development from the three levels of government with the aim of reducing the number and improving the effectiveness of those programs and services; and

b) examine the rural economic development delivery system with the aim of eliminating the overlapping mandates and jurisdictions and of improving the effectiveness of that delivery system.

BD2) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan work with the Government of Canada to develop a substantial source of equity funding by implementing a Saskatchewan Equity Investment Tax Deferral Program, which will make any Saskatchewan resident or corporation who wishes to defer taxes eligible to invest in our province's rural economic development.

BD3) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan encourage and provide support to the Saskatchewan's economic development associations to examine the potential of an "angel" investment network to increase equity funding available to rural Saskatchewan businesses.

BD4) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan build on existing business groups, programs and resources (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, Women Entrepreneurs, Saskatchewan Council for Community Development, etc.) to create an effective network of leaders and mentors. As well, resources need to be provided that will ensure that

community boards and entrepreneurs have access to the information necessary to implement effective governance systems.

BD5) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan facilitate the initiatives necessary to improve the liquidity of investments in community projects and businesses in rural Saskatchewan.

BD6) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan:

a) replace the current tax credit program on capital purchases used for manufacturing and processing with a Provincial Sales Tax (PST) exemption program; and

b) develop and make public a plan for:

   i) the systematic elimination of the Corporate Capital Tax, and

   ii) the staged reduction of the Corporate Income Tax to ensure Saskatchewan's businesses can stay competitive with those in other provinces.

BD7) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan simplify and develop an integrated approach (preferably a one-window contact) for the business development approval process from project conception through the start-up of the enterprise.

BD8) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan mandate Saskatchewan Government Insurance to aggressively develop the partnerships and the policies that will allow affordable insurance packages to meet the needs of Saskatchewan's rural businesses.

BD9) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan provide seed money and facilitate the implementation of the "Saskatchewan Works Fund," as proposed by Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation (SAC) and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, because this proposal recognizes the needs of rural businesses and will provide a source of capital investment for rural economic development that is not being met by other funding mechanisms.

ACRE's Crown Land Subcommittee

CL1) ACRE recommends that, through consultation with stakeholders, the Government of Saskatchewan develop an overarching goal for Crown land management. The goal needs to address:

a) the purpose for the Crown holding Crown land;

b) the criteria for balancing economic, environmental, and social considerations; and

c) the criteria for retaining or disposing of Crown land.

CL2) ACRE recommends that the Crown land inventory be divided into two categories, based on land type and the overarching goal established respecting Crown land use. These two categories should be managed, according to the following:

a) Land that is deemed important to be retained by the Crown should be administered by one government agency mandated to use the land to facilitate economic activity while ensuring it is protected and preserved for future generations. Appropriate linkages must be coordinated with affected departments to ensure the management of the land meets broad government goals as mandated by the various departments. While some economies are expected through an amalgamation of the land holdings into one agency, adequate resources must be provided to the agency in order that the true potential of the portfolio can be achieved. Appropriate fees need to be developed for new initiatives that recognize the rights being disposed and the factors limiting use.

b) Land that is deemed surplus[1] should be managed with a mandate to dispose of and obtain market value for the land. The time frame for disposal should recognize: existing agreements; revenue for government; the impact large blocks of land entering the market will have on land values; opportunities to meet conservation objectives through vehicles like conservation agreements; and economic development opportunities.

[1] Includes all lands that are no longer required to meet legal obligations (i.e. Treaty Land Entitlement or TLE or for environmental (i.e. wildlife, fragile, representative areas, etc.); economic (i.e. forestry, sand gravel, minerals, etc.); or social (i.e. public use, heritage, etc.) reasons. The process to identify the specific lands should be developed through further stakeholder consultation.

CL3) ACRE recommends that the economic opportunities associated with non-traditional land uses and in particular, where these uses can co-exist with others, be promoted, ensuring existing rights are not altered without appropriate compensation. A model to determine appropriate compensation needs to be developed that accounts for the actual impact of the new/existing activity on the existing user's operation, including loss of use, nuisance and overall impact to the existing management and an appeal mechanism put in place where the model does not adequately compensate the existing user.

CL4) ACRE recommends that clear processes be included in regulation to allow the land administering agencies to deal effectively with actions that result in, or have the potential to result in, ecological damage to the land. The processes need to be progressive and where appropriate, provide opportunities for corrective action. However, they must also allow the agencies to deal with abuse effectively where the abuser fails to correct his/her approach and the land is at risk.

CL5) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan develop and adopt provincial integrated resource management planning standards that ensure the provincial interests are accounted for in regional and local planning exercises. Government also needs to ensure that the planning process is made as "proponent friendly" as possible in order to encourage economic development.

FEEDBACK

Many people have chosen to live in small town Saskatchewan because of the lifestyle, and they are prepared to fight tooth and nail to survive and protect what they have.

-Yorkton

CL6) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan incorporate into land use policies recognition of the existing rights associated with a disposition and communicate with lease holders, in order to avoid confusion if additional rights are extended to other land users.

CL7) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan ensure contractual obligations to First Nations are honoured, including Treaty Land Entitlements (TLE) and Specific Land Claims. The commitments made to First Nations under these agreements, as well as commitments to third party interests (i.e. lease and permit holders), as they relate to TLE and Specific Land Claims, must be communicated in a way that enhances the understanding of both First Nations and non-First Nations people.

CL8) ACRE recommends that the outdated *Provincial Lands Act* and regulations under the *Act* be re-written. The authorities contained in the *Act* need to be updated and modernized and the legislation needs to:

a) account for all provincially owned Crown land;

b) respect the existing rights;

c) define, assess, and regulate multi-use opportunities;

d) define, assess, and regulate non-traditional use opportunities;

e) provide alternative disposition options (i.e. licenses) that result in fewer rights being disposed of in some circumstances;

f) provide authority to dispose of lands that are deemed surplus to the province's needs;

g) require use of integrated resource management tools when making land use decisions;

h) provide authority to deal with mismanagement of land where the land is being harmed;

i) provide authority to acquire lands that are deemed to be in the public interest;

j) balance the disposition of private benefits with the overall public good;

k) respect the rights allocated through a disposition and fairly compensate the holder of these rights when impacted by other dispositions;

l) re-affirm the commitment of the province to settle TLE and Specific Land Claims; and

m) provide the flexibility to address future changes to land use needs.

ACRE's Rural Infrastructure Subcommittee

RI1) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan promote and support a regional approach to infrastructure development.

RI2) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan, in conjunction with the private sector, develop a provincial economic development strategy, and a supportive rural infrastructure strategy, while ensuring a high level of coordination and cooperation among and within provincial government departments and Crown corporations for the implementation of these strategies.

ACRE's Rural Employment Subcommittee

RE1) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan establish a Labour-Business Council, which would focus on private sector labour issues including those in rural Saskatchewan. A mechanism is required for labour and business to foster dialogue, develop mutual respect and develop areas of agreement.

a) The council would be made up of:

   i. Six representatives recommended by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, who would then appoint a co-chair;

   ii. Six representatives recommended by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, who would then appoint a co-chair; and

   iii. Secretariat: Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization, Labour, and Industry and Resources. The committee would report to these ministers.

b) Functions would include an evaluation of the manner in which the legislation is functioning, the identification of problems and recommendations for legislative amendments.

c) It is important that each organization be allowed to assign the representatives without obtaining consensus from government or from the other party.

d) The committee would start with "big picture" discussions to develop a relationship and build trust. They would then move to discuss more controversial issues.

RE2) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan improve access to apprenticeship training in rural Saskatchewan by introducing a program similar to Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). RAP is a special program that allows students to get started on an apprenticeship during high school and get paid for their work.

RE3) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan press the federal government to speed up the time taken for apprentices to receive Employment Insurance benefits when on education leave.

RE4) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan establish an apprenticeship training tax credit that would encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in certain skilled trades.

RE5) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan provide further funding and that the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission expand its efforts to recruit and train Aboriginal apprentices.

RE6) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan create a trade job bank that matches potential employers and/or sponsors with interested employees/students.

RE7) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan increase flexibility in compulsory training ratios related to apprenticeship certification for rural and small businesses.

RE8) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan place a renewed emphasis on training for the trades and enhance trade learning by providing more funding for SIAST and the Regional Colleges.

RE9) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan increase the in-community rural delivery of various types of training through the Regional Colleges, SIAST, universities and other means. New delivery options for rural Saskatchewan need to be explored that provide for both theory and practical training. Additional funding would be required to fund additional training in rural Saskatchewan.

RE10) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan require primary schools to begin career counseling in grade school to increase awareness of careers (especially trades) and understanding of training choices, and require secondary schools to enhance career development and counseling services.

RE11) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan make further efforts to build relationships between Aboriginal individuals, communities and groups, involved governments, educational institutions and employers to provide adequate opportunities for Aboriginal students. More must be done to respond to the training needs and initiatives of Aboriginal people.

RE12) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan increase Basic Education programming and the Provincial Training Allowance to enroll more students in Basic Education.

RE13) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan substantially expand the existing programs (Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program and Migrant Workers' Program) in response to identified skill and worker shortages.

RE14) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan continue ongoing identification of employment skill needs and labour shortages.

RE15) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan enhance cultural and other support mechanisms for immigrants, such as language, settlement funding and recognition of bona fide foreign credentials.

RE16) ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan aggressively examine the barriers faced by immigrants, and promote immigration programs to employers and potential immigrants.

About ACRE: Phase I

The original 43 members of the ACRE first met in the fall of 2000. We were appointed by the provincial government, chosen to represent all areas of the rural economy. At our first meeting, we discussed our mandate: to work at the grassroots level to identify solutions for the economic future of rural Saskatchewan. Initially, this seemed overwhelming. However, after spending four years working together and considering the future of rural Saskatchewan, we believe we are making progress.

In the first phase of ACRE, members formed subcommittees to take in-depth looks at several aspects of the rural economy. ACRE's subcommittees focused on the areas of: agriculture, agri-value, community in evolution, farm structure / farm income, grains and oilseeds, the resource sector, rural manufacturing and construction, tools for economic development, and transportation.

Once each of these subcommittees had a chance to study issues, meet with relevant stakeholders, and create draft reports, ACRE held meetings around Saskatchewan to share our work and consult with those people who know the most about the rural economy: rural residents. We found that we were on the right track. For the most part, rural residents agreed with our analysis, and concurred with the recommendations we had developed.

In total, we presented 185 recommendations to the Province of Saskatchewan.

Since the formation of ACRE, we have seen positive change. The Province has directly responded to several of our recommendations. For example, there have been changes to Farm Land Ownership Regulations, gas and oil royalty structures, and Corporate Capital taxation policies. The Government has recently announced the creation of a Department of Rural Development, and is now working to address the need for more venture capital for startup operations in rural Saskatchewan. While there are some areas where Government has not been as quick to respond as we would have liked – for example, in providing financial relief to small communities facing high energy costs for cultural and recreational centers – overall, the Province has listened to us, and we are making a difference. We believe that our work is helping to create a competitive business environment in rural Saskatchewan.

In our first report, we said that positive changes must come not only from the Province, but from within our rural communities. We believe that, since the release of our Phase I Final Report, there has been a fundamental change in Saskatchewan residents' view of the future of rural Saskatchewan. In spite of early frosts, the BSE crisis, and rising oil and gas costs, rural residents are adopting a more positive attitude toward rural development. Groups such as Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation Inc., the Chambers of Commerce, and Rotary Clubs are promoting Saskatchewan success stories. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) has embarked on a process they call "Clearing the Path," to identify and eliminate rural municipal barriers to business development. Media outlets are producing more and more positive stories about rural business. And best of all, individual communities are doing more to make themselves open for business and to make their towns a better place for current and prospective residents to live.

It is with this background that we accepted an extension and expansion of ACRE's mandate, and began the second phase of our work.

About ACRE: Phase II

In December 2002, the provincial government extended and expanded ACRE's mandate. This extension gave ACRE an opportunity to take an in-depth look at additional aspects of the rural economy, and also a formal mandate to monitor the Province as it implements its *Strategy for Rural Saskatchewan*.

In order to monitor the provincial government's implementation of rural policies, ACRE members have been meeting regularly with the Honourable Clay Serby, Deputy Premier and Minister of Rural Development, who serves as ACRE Co-Chair. We also receive regular updates on the status of each of our 185 recommendations from provincial government staff. ACRE members are paying close attention to the Province's responses to our original recommendations.

In order to examine additional aspects of the rural economy, the ACRE Executive met to review our first phase of work, to determine which areas we felt required more research and study. Ultimately, we chose to work in the areas of employment, Crown lands, infrastructure, and business development, and formed four new subcommittees to examine these areas.

These subcommittees spent over a year researching, deliberating, and meeting with relevant stakeholders.

By fall 2004, the subcommittees had completed the first drafts of their reports, and were anxious to begin public consultations to gauge the public reaction to the recommendations they had drafted. In December 2004 and January 2005, ACRE held public meetings in Yorkton, Tisdale, Carlyle, Swift Current, Unity and Canwood. These consultations were well attended, and meeting participants were eager to discuss ACRE's recommendations and the future of rural Saskatchewan.

Almost all of the recommendations ACRE drafted in its first phase were well received by the public. However, in Phase II, as ACRE grappled with issues that were more difficult, public consultations revealed a wide range of public opinions. Many participants at consultation meetings did not agree with some of ACRE's draft recommendations, and some took time to provide ACRE with more information, or to meet or call ACRE members to discuss specific issues in more detail. We appreciate this input, and, as a result, we have incorporated many changes into our final report.

While it is difficult to deal with issues that result in division, we are glad we were able to spark debate, and that there is such a high level of public interest in our work. Public discussion of these crucial issues is vital to the future of rural Saskatchewan.

FEEDBACK

You're doing a good job. You're making us think about things that we don't normally think about."

-Swift Current

ACRE's Phase II Subcommittee Work: A Summary

Because ACRE has drafted a total of 35 detailed Phase II recommendations, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive, short summary, and we strongly encourage you to read our entire report. This section provides only a general overview of the main policy issues that each of the four subcommittees has grappled with and addressed through their deliberations.

Business Development

This subcommittee looked at the hurdles and challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs and business enterprises. After examining the many programs that different levels of government provide for business, the Business Development subcommittee recommends that these programs be rationalized and simplified to ensure they are accessible and understandable for potential users. The subcommittee also recommends that the Province work to enhance capital funding available to entrepreneurs through a variety of measures, ensure better access to mentorship programs, and consider tax changes to ensure our businesses stay competitive.

Crown Lands Subcommittee

In its examination of provincial-owned land, this subcommittee continuously faced the question, "Is Crown land being managed effectively?" The subcommittee's eight recommendations suggest ways the Province can obtain the greatest economic impact from Crown land while maintaining resources for future generations and respecting the rights of existing leaseholders.

Infrastructure Subcommittee

This subcommittee examined many types of physical and social infrastructure. In its initial report prior to public consultation, the subcommittee recommended that the Province commit to a coordinated strategy of ensuring the existence of infrastructure in a defined number of regional centres, for the benefit of that centre and the surrounding region. During public consultations, it became obvious that many rural residents and stakeholders did not support this approach, and saw it as a threat to the existence of communities that might not be regional centres. In view of this public reaction, the subcommittee revised its report by removing the contentious recommendation. Instead the report presents the subcommittee's views, and alternatives suggested during the consultation process, as the basis for further discussion. The subcommittee continues to make two other recommendations that appeared in the initial report: that the Province promote and support a regional approach to infrastructure development; and that it develop a provincial economic strategy, together with a strategy for the provision of supportive rural infrastructure that is implemented through a co-operative effort involving all government departments and corporations.

Rural Employment

After examining the many issues related to rural employment, this subcommittee developed a number of key messages. The Province must:

- create a friendly labour-business climate;
- improve the training system as it relates to preparing people for jobs in the trades;
- provide more rural-based training and career advice for students; and
- engage the Aboriginal population in the labour force.

Business Development Subcommittee

Business development is key for the future of rural Saskatchewan. This subcommittee was created to focus on the tools, strategies and skills that rural businesses need to be successful.

Throughout the course of its work, the subcommittee looked at several issues related to business development, including the challenges faced by entrepreneurs and expanding enterprises. Some specific items the subcommittee examined were: access to expertise, government programs, business planning tools, availability of equity capital and insurance, education and training, and attitudes toward success.

As part of its background research, the Business Development Subcommittee commissioned a research project to provide background information on the state of business in rural Saskatchewan. Members were pleased to find that the report, completed by Doug Elliott, publisher of the SaskTrends Monitor and titled *Rural Business in Saskatchewan*, found that entrepreneurship is alive and well in rural Saskatchewan. Rural Saskatchewan has a large and growing business community. Approximately 70 per cent of Saskatchewan's businesses are located in rural areas. The subcommittee believes that this large number of rural businesses indicates a strong entrepreneurial base, and a strong likelihood that many rural entrepreneurs would seize an opportunity to expand and grow, if they had access to the basic tools to help them ensure success.

The subcommittee focused on the tools that entrepreneurs and small business need: improved programs, services and delivery agents, multiple levels of financing and enhanced management expertise targeted specifically at rural needs. The subcommittee has developed nine detailed recommendations to achieve these goals.

1. Rationalization of Rural Economic Development Programs and Delivery System

In examining existing programs and services available to rural entrepreneurs, the subcommittee discovered that more than 1,200 different business-related programs and services are offered by different departments, branches and organizations funded by the three levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal). Because there are so many programs, many are not sufficiently funded to be useful to those they are intended to serve. The existence of multiple delivery agents makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to choose the program most suitable for their situation, and many potential users are not aware of the numerous programs available. These well-intended efforts to build the economy have become an ineffective and wasteful use of the scarce resources that are a vital part of encouraging economic development.

ACRE believes there is a need for all levels of government to coordinate economic development activities, and to create co-terminus boundaries for the delivery of these economic development services.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 1

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan work with the Government of Canada, and with municipal governments in Saskatchewan, to create a Task Force that will:

a. examine the programs and services offered for rural economic development from the three levels of government with the aim of reducing the number and improving the effectiveness of those programs and services; and

b. examine the rural economic development delivery system with the aim of eliminating the overlapping mandates and jurisdictions, and of improving the effectiveness of that delivery system.

2. Saskatchewan Equity Investment Tax Deferral Program

A report produced for ACRE by Doug Elliot and Ken Perlich in 2001 (*Growing the Rural Economy*) identified that, over the next 20 years, an incremental investment of $40 billion would be required to build a vibrant economy in rural Saskatchewan. This amount of funding is simply not currently available.

To address this, the subcommittee recommends the creation of a new tax deferral initiative that expands on an existing tax deferral initiative by broadening the range of potential eligible deferrals and operates as a managed fund, financing a broad range of business enterprises.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 2

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan work with the Government of Canada to develop a substantial source of equity funding by implementing a Saskatchewan Equity Investment Tax Deferral Program, which will make any Saskatchewan resident or corporation who wishes to defer taxes eligible to invest in our province's rural economic development.

3. Creating an "Angel" Investor Network

"Angel" investors provide funding to business startups or expansions. They generally focus on specific sectors of the economy. Typically, angel investors operate through a broker or investment club, or through existing venture capital funds.

In Saskatoon and Regina, Regional Economic Development Authorities have had discussions with other groups, both private and quasi-public, about the creation of "angel" networks that would bring investors and entrepreneurs together. This has been done successfully in other jurisdictions, resulting in an additional funding option for entrepreneurs.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 3

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan encourage and provide support to Saskatchewan's economic development associations to examine the potential of an "angel" investment network to increase equity funding available to rural Saskatchewan businesses.

4. Mentorship / Governance

ACRE has found that entrepreneurs and community project proponents need better access to advice from their peers, and a better understanding of the governance skills necessary for success. Too many projects in rural Saskatchewan have failed due to a lack of these skills.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 4

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan build on existing business groups, programs, and resources (i.e. Chambers of Commerce, Women Entrepreneurs, Saskatchewan Council for Community Development, etc.) to create an effective network of leaders and mentors. As well, resources need to be provided that will ensure that community boards and entrepreneurs have access to the information necessary to implement effective governance systems.

5. Liquidity of Community and Business Investments

Although local investment is critical for many community projects and businesses, many potential investors are unable or unwilling to commit funds for an indefinite length of time. ACRE has identified that this lack of liquidity is a significant deterrent to the raising of funds for community projects and businesses in rural Saskatchewan. The Financial Securities Commission has been working to ease the process by which these investments can be turned into shares which can be readily traded and turned into cash. However, more needs to be done to make people aware of that option, and an over-the-counter market to trade these shares is still required.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 5

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan facilitate the initiatives necessary to improve the liquidity of investments in community projects and businesses in rural Saskatchewan.

Specifically, the initiatives recommended by the Subcommittee include:

a) mandating the Saskatchewan Financial Securities Commission to clarify its policies and encouraging the process by which community projects and businesses can apply to become "reporting issuers" so that their shares can be more readily traded;

b) working with the Saskatchewan investment community to establish a visible, electronic, over-the-counter market on which the shares of Saskatchewan community projects and businesses can be traded;

c) encouraging community projects and businesses to make the internal management and reporting commitments that will allow them to become "reporting issuers" as soon as possible so that their shares can be more readily traded; and,

d) providing or sponsoring educational seminars and programs to assist management and shareholders of Saskatchewan community projects and businesses to better understand the benefits and costs of reporting issuer status and to develop and maintain cost effective internal compliance systems.

6. Taxation

ACRE has identified that some adjustments to Saskatchewan's taxation system are needed to allow new capital investment to flow into the Province's manufacturing and processing sector. Competitive tax rates are essential to an attractive investment climate.

Under the current system, entrepreneurs pay the PST up front, when they are building their businesses. This up front expense is refunded through income tax rebates, once the business is profitable. Using this system, rather than an exemption from the PST, raises the initial investment requirement. Changing the rebate to an exemption would reduce the capital outlay required and promote more development.

The Corporate Capital Tax (CCT) is assessed according to a complex calculation of a corporation's capital, involving debt, equity, and various credits and deductions. Many provinces have eliminated taxes of this type, or are in the process of reducing them. While Saskatchewan's CCT deductible is the most generous among provinces with such a tax, larger corporations remain at a disadvantage in this province.

Saskatchewan has the highest Corporate Income Tax in Canada, but rebates for manufacturing and processing sectors and proposed reductions for small businesses mean these sectors are or will be competitive in Saskatchewan.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 6

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan:

a) replace the current tax credit program on capital purchases used for manufacturing and processing with a PST exemption program; and

b) develop and make public a plan for:

   i) the systematic elimination of the Corporate Capital Tax, and

   ii) the staged reduction of the Corporate Income Tax to ensure Saskatchewan's businesses can stay competitive with those in other provinces.

7. Improve Regulatory Approval Processes

ACRE has identified that the regulatory process in place for receiving approval for new and expanding rural business projects from the three levels of government is uncoordinated, time-consuming, burdensome, and unpredictable, and is slowing the growth of economic development.

ACRE commends the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities for its "Clearing the Path" initiative – a process to identify and eliminate regulatory burdens that occur at the rural municipal level. The Province must also make a commitment, across departments and Crown corporations, to address these concerns.

FEEDBACK

There are people that want to invest in our communities. We need a vehicle to drive it, and it needs to be simple.

-Unity

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 7

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan simplify and develop an integrated approach (preferably a one-window contact) for the business development approval process from project conception through the start-up of the enterprise.

8. Affordable Insurance

ACRE has seen that some businesses and business sectors are unable to obtain affordable business and/or liability insurance. In meeting with stakeholders, ACRE learned that high premiums for some niche businesses can be a barrier to economic development.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 8

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan mandate Saskatchewan Government Insurance to aggressively develop the partnerships and the policies that will allow affordable insurance packages to meet the needs of Saskatchewan's rural businesses.

9. Support for the Proposed "Saskatchewan Works Fund"

ACRE has identified that there are many potential rural and agricultural developments that offer excellent investment opportunities, but do not fit existing funding mechanisms. Many existing venture capital funds will only invest in firms with business plans forecasting rates of return between 25 and 35 per cent, and a return of invested funds in five years. Most rural and agricultural businesses need, patient (longer-term) capital, and forecast returns between eight and 12 per cent.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Business Development 9

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan provide seed money and facilitate the implementation of the "Saskatchewan Works Fund," as proposed by Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation (SAC) and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, because this proposal recognizes the needs of rural businesses and will provide a source of capital investment for rural economic development that is not being met by other funding mechanisms.

FEEDBACK

I encourage you to think about keeping the costs down of getting in to business, and then taxing them when we get going.

In Saskatchewan, we often want to divide the pie, and divvy up the resources, instead of baking more pie. We need to promote processing. We have everything here. We need to focus on that and literally "bake more pie."

-Carlyle

Crown Land Subcommittee

The ACRE Crown Land Subcommittee was charged with reviewing how Crown land can be used to facilitate economic activity in rural Saskatchewan.

In its examination of provincial-owned land, this subcommittee continuously faced the question, "Is Crown land being managed effectively?" The subcommittee's eight recommendations suggest ways the Province can obtain the greatest economic impact from Crown land while maintaining resources for future generations and respecting the rights of existing leaseholders.

To proceed with its work, the Subcommittee held numerous meetings with stakeholders, and received additional feedback through a questionnaire.

Early in its deliberations, it became clear to the subcommittee that Crown land administration is challenging, and that stakeholder views on how Crown land should be administered cover a broad spectrum and are often in direct conflict. In order to develop recommendations that balance conflicting viewpoints, the subcommittee was guided by the following principles:

- The public's interest in ensuring sustainable Crown land management supersedes any individual allocation of a private benefit.
- Economic activity requires the allocation of private benefits in a manner that results in secure tenure.
- The rights associated with any disposition must be clearly spelled out and understood by the disposition holder.
- Crown land, under native vegetation, represents a valuable inheritance to future generations and must be managed accordingly. Crown retention is but one tool to achieve this.

As a result of its extensive meetings with stakeholders holding conflicting viewpoints, the subcommittee understands that its recommendations will not meet the desires of all interested parties. However, the subcommittee hopes that all stakeholders will understand the balance the subcommittee has sought to achieve.

1. Vision for Crown Land Ownership in Saskatchewan

ACRE believes there is no overall goal or objective clearly articulating the purpose for the Province continuing to hold Crown land, or providing a clear rationale for how Crown land is managed. Within a provincial vision for Crown land, three overarching aspects (economic, environmental, and social) must be balanced in a sustainable manner.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 1

ACRE recommends that, through consultation with stakeholders, the Government of Saskatchewan develop an overarching goal for Crown land management. The goal needs to address:

a) the purpose for the Crown holding Crown land;

b) the criteria for balancing economic, environmental, and social considerations; and,

c) the criteria for retaining or disposing of Crown land.

2. Crown Land Inventory

Saskatchewan's Crown land is managed by a variety of different agencies, all of which have different mandates and procedures. And, there are likely land types that no longer should be owned by the Crown.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 2

ACRE recommends that the Crown land inventory be divided into two categories, based on land type and the overarching goal established respecting Crown land use. These two categories should be managed, according to the following:

a) Land that is deemed important to be retained by the Crown should be administered by one government agency mandated to use the land to facilitate economic activity while ensuring it is protected and preserved for future generations. Appropriate linkages must be coordinated with affected departments to ensure the management of the land meets broad government goals as mandated by the various departments. While some economies are expected through an amalgamation of the land holdings into one agency, adequate resources must be provided to the agency in order that the true potential of the portfolio can be achieved. Appropriate fees need to be developed for new initiatives that recognize the rights being disposed and the factors limiting use.

b) Land that is deemed surplus[1] should be managed with a mandate to dispose of and obtain market value for the land. The time frame for disposal should recognize: existing agreements; revenue for government; the impact large blocks of land entering the market will have on land values; opportunities to meet conservation objectives through vehicles like conservation agreements; and economic development opportunities.

1 Includes all lands that are no longer required to meet legal obligations (i.e. Treaty Land Entitlement or TLE or for environmental (i.e. wildlife, fragile, representative areas, etc.); economic (i.e. forestry, sand gravel, minerals, etc.); or social (i.e. public use, heritage, etc.) reasons. The process to identify the specific lands should be developed through further stakeholder consultation.

3. Non-Traditional Land Uses

ACRE's initial report included a recommendation to pursue non-traditional and multiple land uses. This opportunity still exists, and it is essential that the Province take the necessary steps to allow this to occur on Crown land, while recognizing the rights of existing lessees.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 3

ACRE recommends that the economic opportunities associated with non-traditional land uses, and in particular, where these uses can co-exist with others, be promoted, ensuring existing rights are not altered without appropriate compensation. A model to determine appropriate compensation needs to be developed that accounts for the actual impact of the new/existing activity on the existing user's operation, including loss of use, nuisance and overall impact to the existing management and an appeal mechanism put in place where the model does not adequately compensate the existing user.

4. Crown Land Management

ACRE recognizes the importance of proper land management of Crown land in order to ensure this precious resource is maintained for future generations.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 4

ACRE recommends that clear processes be included in regulation to allow the land administering agencies to deal effectively with actions that result in, or have the potential to result in, ecological damage to the land. The processes need to be progressive and, where appropriate, provide opportunities for corrective action. However, they must also allow the agencies to deal with abuse effectively where the abuser fails to correct his/her approach and the land is at risk.

5. Integrated Resource Management

Integrated resource management is important in resolving land use conflicts. While there has been a number of planning initiatives in the past few years, provincial interests have not been expressed consistently. As well, drawn out planning processes can impede development.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 5

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan develop and adopt provincial integrated resource management planning standards that ensure the provincial interests are accounted for in regional and local planning exercises. Government also needs to ensure that the planning process is made as "proponent friendly" as possible in order to encourage economic development.

6. Understanding Rights Associated with a Crown Land Disposition

ACRE has identified a general lack of understanding regarding the rights associated with a disposition of Crown land, by both holders of the disposition and the public at large.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 6

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan incorporate into land use policies recognition of the existing rights associated with a disposition, and communicate with lease holders, in order to avoid confusion if additional rights are extended to other land users.

7. Treaty Land Entitlement

ACRE recognizes the importance of settling Treaty Land Entitlements (TLEs) with First Nations, and has identified a great deal of misunderstanding in this area by the general public and even within the First Nations communities. As well as confirming its commitment to First Nations, government must clearly communicate its intention to meet this commitment, as well as its commitment to third party interest holders.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 7

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan ensure contractual obligations to First Nations are honoured, including TLE and Specific Land Claims. The commitments made to First Nations under these agreements, as well as commitments to third party interests (i.e. lease and permit holders), as they relate to TLE and Specific Land Claims, must be communicated in a way that enhances the understanding of both First Nations and non-First Nations people.

8. The Provincial Lands Act

An appropriate legislative framework is vital for good Crown land administration. Saskatchewan has one of the oldest Acts in Canada. ACRE recommends that *The Provincial Lands Act* be opened, updated, and changed to reflect the other recommendations put forward by this subcommittee.

During ACRE's public consultations, it became clear that not all stakeholders support this recommendation to open the *Act*. Some stakeholders are concerned that any changes to the *Act* may reduce the rights and benefits they currently hold. However, ACRE believes that by opening the *Act* now, the Province will have the ability to take the time to consult with stakeholders. The alternative, waiting until the Province is forced to re-open the *Act*, may result in new legislation that is less favourable.

FEEDBACK

Crown Land is very important to our natural heritage. We should put more value on the environment.

– Yorkton

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Crown Land 8

ACRE recommends that the outdated *Provincial Lands Act* and regulations under the *Act* be re-written. The authorities contained in the *Act* need to be updated and modernized and the legislation needs to:

a) account for all provincially owned Crown land;

b) respect the existing rights;

c) define, assess, and regulate multi-use opportunities;

d) define, assess and regulate non-traditional use opportunities;

e) provide alternative disposition options (i.e. licenses) that result in fewer rights being disposed of in some circumstances;

f) provide authority to deal with mismanagement of land where the land is being harmed;

g) require use of integrated resource management tools when making land use decisions;

h) provide authority to dispose of lands that are deemed surplus to the province's needs;

i) provide authority to acquire lands that are deemed to be in the public interest;

j) balance the disposition of private benefits with the overall public good;

k) respect the rights allocated through a disposition and fairly compensate the holder of these rights when impacted by other dispositions;

l) re-affirm the commitment of the province to settle TLE and Specific Land Claims; and

m) provide the flexibility to address future changes to land use needs.

Infrastructure Subcommittee

The infrastructure subcommittee's mandate was to develop broad policy recommendations on how infrastructure resources can most efficiently and effectively encourage and support economic development in Saskatchewan south of the northern forest region, excluding the cities of Regina and Saskatoon.

The subcommittee defined "infrastructure" as including both economic or "hard" infrastructure (transportation, landfills, water, sewage, natural gas, and telecommunications), and social or "soft" infrastructure (bricks and mortar required for health care, education and recreation). The subcommittee specifically did not address municipal governance.

Any approach to infrastructure has to face the reality that rural Saskatchewan is a large geographic area with a relatively small population. This has often meant that there is no business case, from an infrastructure provider's perspective, to justify infrastructure. In a sense, providing infrastructure to rural Saskatchewan has been both a social policy and an economic one. This means that Saskatchewan has traditionally used the equity approach to infrastructure development, giving everyone more or less equal access to basic infrastructure at a level feasible for the location.

The subcommittee suggested an alternative approach: *targeting* new infrastructure by providing resources to a defined number of regional centres where infrastructure is most needed and can be most beneficial in supporting existing and potential clusters and corridors of economic and social activity within the surrounding region.

During public consultations, comments from the public and local elected officials centered largely on a belief that the subcommittee was recommending that infrastructure be removed from places that were not regional centres, or that non-regional centres should not receive any funding in the future. The subcommittee did not recommend that any infrastructure be removed from any community, and specifically stated that in its interim report. Infrastructure providers must have flexibility to provide infrastructure for major investments in such sectors as resource development, First Nations development, agriculture, and tourism regardless of their location. As well, the subcommittee believes that essential existing infrastructure (water, sewage treatment, power, telephone, and natural gas) must be maintained, although in the future it may be more suitable to provide some of these services on a regional rather than community basis.

FEEDBACK

When you make a recommendation to target infrastructure to regional centres, that causes some real concern in rural Saskatchewan.

-Unity

Following public and private consultations, and the review of submissions, the subcommittee revised its recommendations in light of widespread opposition and a considerable degree of misunderstanding of the subcommittee's intent. Instead, the subcommittee opted to lay out its views, and alternatives suggested during the consultation process, so that the discussion can continue over the nature of infrastructure in rural Saskatchewan. The subcommittee continues to believe that a *regional centre* approach is positive for rural development, because it provides a necessary level of certainty in the provision of infrastructure, addresses Saskatchewan's declining population, and ensures the development of strong regional centres with a large complement of services for its surrounding region.

The regional centre concept is not a radical approach. Saskatchewan has been, and is slowly moving from an equity approach to a targeted approach to infrastructure. For example, because of deregulation and business considerations, Crown utilities have moved largely to a commercial case or user pay model in providing infrastructure, which, by default, results in businesses clustering near larger centres to access lower-cost services. Fiscal limitations on Departments of Health and Learning have resulted in facilities being located in larger centres or clusters. And, in the private sector, rural residents often by-pass local communities to shop at larger regional centres or cities.

Despite many views to the contrary in rural Saskatchewan, strong regional centres can benefit smaller communities. The existence of a nearby regional centre often results in the availability of services in a smaller community that could not normally support such services, such as a branch of a regional Credit Union, or the weekly services of a lawyer or accountant from a regional office.

Articulate arguments were made during consultations that "self-defined" regions would be more effective than a system of defined regional centres for service provision. Using self-determined boundaries, local residents would establish voluntary regional municipal partnerships to plan, build and operate local infrastructure. Project boundaries would shift and vary, depending on the nature of the infrastructure and local needs. While this method would allow people with local expertise to make decisions quickly, the subcommittee cautions that there is uncertainty associated with voluntary partnerships, that controversial decisions may create divisions within a region, and that spreading major infrastructure over several centres may create a situation where residents bypass local communities to travel to larger centres where all of the services they need are available in one place.

The subcommittee feels that both the regional centre approach and the "self-defined" regions approach need further discussion and consideration. In assessing both concepts, each will need to be

FEEDBACK

We have to retain as many viable communities in Saskatchewan as possible. For me, a viable community should have a curling rink, a good baseball park, a golf course nearby, and a school. Lots of jobs in rural Saskatchewan are not filled because quality of life needs are not met here.

-Carlyle

examined to determine if they will create the necessary certainty that will encourage the private sector to invest in rural Saskatchewan. The subcommittee suggests that, without this certainty, investment dollars, families looking for employment opportunities and retirees seeking assurance of health services will continue to flow to a handful of the larger cities in Saskatchewan, as has happened over the last 50 years.

1) Regional Approach

Many infrastructure projects have the potential to benefit several communities and could be built regionally, such as water, sewage treatment, and landfills. The subcommittee believes the Province should design future funding mechanisms to ensure that regional projects of this type are recognized and rewarded.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Infrastructure 1

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan promote and support a regional approach to infrastructure development.

FEEDBACK

A regional centre needs strong towns surrounding it to remain strong.

We find a way to make things work. There are a lot of things communities can do on their own. As mentioned before, there has to be more cooperation with the local communities.

-Swift Current

2) Economic Strategy and Rural Infrastructure Strategy

The subcommittee has found that Saskatchewan does not have an economic development strategy in place, and that there is no coordinated or central strategy for infrastructure provision in rural Saskatchewan. Instead, government departments and Crown corporations have their own individual business plans for building and renewing infrastructure.

While it is not easy for many diverse stakeholders with different objectives to work together, success in the expansion of Saskatchewan's forestry industry provides a concrete example of how government entities and the private sector can work together to achieve common goals.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Infrastructure 2

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan, in conjunction with the private sector, develop a provincial economic development strategy, and a supportive rural infrastructure strategy, while ensuring a high level of coordination and cooperation among and within provincial government departments and Crown corporations for the implementation of these strategies.

FEEDBACK

When it comes to economic development, if there's a plant to be built, everyone wants it in their town. So – you have less support for something going on in the next town.

-Canwood

Rural Employment Subcommittee

This subcommittee was created to suggest ways to enhance employers' abilities to create rural employment opportunities. This work supports a goal put forward by ACRE in its first phase: to develop a network of strong, dynamic rural communities.

After studying background material, the Rural Employment Subcommittee realized that most of the restructuring required as a result of declining employment in Saskatchewan's agricultural sector has already taken place, and that Saskatchewan's future employment policy must also focus on other sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, mining, and forestry.

There are many issues to explore in this area. After much deliberation, and meeting with several stakeholders from many areas of the rural economy, the subcommittee limited its focus to:

- improving competitiveness of rural employers by enhancing core skills of management and labour;
- providing rural Saskatchewan with reasonable access to post-secondary, technical, and professional training and development;
- providing mechanisms to engage Aboriginal, and in particular Aboriginal youth, in rural development and employment initiatives;
- encouraging new Saskatchewan residents to live in rural Saskatchewan by promoting the benefits and providing adequate support services; and
- fostering a harmonious labour relations climate.

The subcommittee examined relevant literature and has summarized much information in its final report.

The subcommittee has put forward a number of key messages. The Province must:

- create a friendly labour-business climate;
- improve its training system as it relates to preparing people for jobs in the trades; and
- engage the Aboriginal population in the labour force.

1. Business Friendly Employment Environment

If Saskatchewan's economy is to grow as we shift from an agricultural based economy to an economy based on all primary resources and enhanced manufacturing, we must create an environment where employees and employers can work collaboratively to address public policy and workplace challenges. The subcommittee found that labour policy has created contention between Saskatchewan business and organized labour. Other jurisdictions in Canada have established forums to help address business/labour issues.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 1

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan establish a Labour-Business Council, which would focus on private sector labour issues including those in rural Saskatchewan. A mechanism is required for labour and business to foster dialogue, develop mutual respect and develop areas of agreement.

a) The council would be made up of:
   i) Six representatives recommended by the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, who would then appoint a co-chair;
   ii) Six representatives recommended by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, who would then appoint a co-chair; and
   iii) Secretariat: Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, Labour, and Industry and Resources. The committee would report to these ministers.

b) Functions would include an evaluation of the manner in which the legislation is functioning, the identification of problems and recommendations for legislative amendments.

c) It is important that each organization be allowed to assign the representatives without obtaining consensus from government or from the other party.

d) The committee would start with "big picture" discussions to develop a relationship and build trust. They would then move to discuss more controversial issues.

2. Education and Skills Training

A. Apprenticeship Training

ACRE has identified a shortage of apprentices in certain trades and has heard from stakeholders that the system does not have adequate capacity to meet current and future needs. After consulting with stakeholders, ACRE has developed several recommendations to address this issue.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 2

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan improve access to apprenticeship training in rural Saskatchewan by introducing a program similar to Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). RAP is a special program that allows students to get started on an apprenticeship during high school and get paid for their work.

ACRE has identified that the length of time taken for apprentices to receive federal Employment Insurance benefits when on education leave is an issue for many apprentices and potential apprentices.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 3

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan press the federal government to speed up the time taken for apprentices to receive Employment Insurance benefits when on education leave.

FEEDBACK

We need people to be educated, but we also need to retain them.

-Carlyle

A tax credit program for businesses that are training apprentices could provide incentives for employers to increase the capacity of the apprenticeship system.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 4

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan establish an apprenticeship training tax credit that would encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in certain skilled trades.

ACRE realizes that the number of Aboriginal apprentices has increased significantly in recent years, but more must be done in this area.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 5

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan provide further funding and that the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission expand its efforts to recruit and train Aboriginal apprentices.

Matching potential employees to appropriate opportunities would help those wishing to enter the apprenticeship training system to find an employer willing to sponsor them. It would also link students in pre-employment programs with employers, once they have completed their technical training.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 6

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan create a trade job bank that matches potential employers and/or sponsors with interested employees/students.

In some cases, current apprenticeship rules require employers to have a ratio of one tradesperson to one apprentice. This constraint can be a hardship for small businesses, especially where only one tradesperson is available.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 7

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan increase flexibility in compulsory training ratios related to apprenticeship certification for rural and small businesses.

B. Funding for Trades Training

ACRE has identified that, in order to ensure adequate trades training, increased funding is needed for SIAST and the Regional Colleges. Existing funding is not adequate to respond to the needs, particularly in rural Saskatchewan.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 8

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan place a renewed emphasis on training for the trades, and enhance trade learning by providing more funding for SIAST and the Regional Colleges.

FEEDBACK

Expand trades training - apprenticeship training - in Rural Saskatchewan and ensure Aboriginal concerns and needs are part of the total package.

-Unity

C. Access to Enhanced Skills Training

ACRE has identified that the current training delivery system is not adequately responsive to the needs of rural residents. For various reasons, some rural people are unable to travel to major centres for training. Further, when people do relocate to major centres for training, many do not return to work in rural areas.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 9

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan increase the in-community rural delivery of various types of training through the Regional Colleges, SIAST, universities, and other means. New delivery options for rural Saskatchewan need to be explored that provide for both theory and practical training. Additional funding would be required to fund additional training in rural Saskatchewan.

ACRE has found that many young people have an inadequate knowledge of career options and training possibilities. In particular, specific attention must be paid to career options for Aboriginal people.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 10

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan require primary schools to begin career counseling in grade school to increase awareness of careers (especially trades) and understanding of training choices, and require secondary schools to enhance career development and counseling services.

Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population is an important component of tomorrow's workforce. However, there is currently a significant gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment rates.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 11

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan make further efforts to build relationships between Aboriginal individuals, communities and groups, involved governments, educational institutions and employers to provide adequate opportunities for Aboriginal students. More must be done to respond to the training needs and initiatives of Aboriginal people.

ACRE has identified a lack of funds for the delivery of Basic Education in rural Saskatchewan. Basic Education provides upgrading, to allow those who have left school to complete a grade 12 education. An increase in funding for Basic Education with a set amount targeted to rural areas could decrease wait times. The Provincial Training Allowance provides funding to learners while they receive Basic Education.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 12

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan increase Basic Education programming and the Provincial Training Allowance to enroll more students in Basic Education.

3. Immigration

ACRE has identified that there are worker and skill shortages in some sectors and more are anticipated in the future. Immigrants can meet some of these needs.

While the Migrant Workers' Program works well, there is potential to expand the program to include other industries with seasonal labour requirements. This program is not a cheap source of labour, but is an effective mechanism to allow producers to acquire a core of workers who will be available throughout the production season.

The Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program allows employers to hire qualified immigrants for most technical, trade and professional occupations in the province.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 13

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan substantially expand the existing programs (Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program and Migrant Workers' Program) in response to identified skill and worker shortages.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 14

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan continue ongoing identification of employment skill needs and labour shortages.

Once immigrants come to Saskatchewan, more or enhanced follow up is required to ensure a smooth transition.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 15

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan enhance cultural and other support mechanisms for immigrants, such as language, settlement funding and recognition of bona fide foreign credentials.

Generally, ACRE believes an approach where the Province interviews residents who have been through the immigration process could be used to determine where changes are needed.

ACRE RECOMMENDS

Rural Employment 16

ACRE recommends that the Government of Saskatchewan aggressively examine the barriers faced by immigrants, and promote immigration programs to employers and potential immigrants.

FEEDBACK

We need more workers in rural areas. Increase the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program quota to at least 1,000 per year.

Students are not aware enough of programs and opportunities in the trades. Additional training for counseling would be helpful.

-Swift Current

Conclusion

ACRE members are looking forward to seeing the Province evaluate and implement these recommendations. We greatly appreciate the time we have had to work together to investigate these issues, and especially appreciate the opportunity we have had to discuss our ideas with rural residents. We know that our work will make a difference to the future of rural Saskatchewan.

ACRE members, having spent so much time studying Saskatchewan's rural economy, have come to firmly believe that rural Saskatchewan is a land of opportunities. The potential for rural economic growth is greater now than at any other time in recent history. However, it will take the effort of all Saskatchewan residents to allow this growth to come about.

FEEDBACK

We should spend more time promoting Saskatchewan to our own youth.

-Unity

A lot of people don't like to change things in Saskatchewan because every time you change things in Saskatchewan, somebody gets hurt and somebody wins. It sounds like ACRE wants to change things so more people win.

-Unity

The status quo is not on in Craik.

-Swift Current

I think we've got to realize that change is always going to give us some opportunity and opportunity is good.

-Unity

When/if the government acts on these recommendations, it is important that a "rural lens" is constantly applied to the decision making process. It is important to have key people throughout the province involved, to make sure there is ownership. Engagement is important.

-Tisdale

I appreciate your effort. I like "solution-based thinking."

-Carlyle

Appendix: ACRE Members

Note: * indicates that the individual is a member of the ACRE Executive Committee.

ACRE Co-Chairs

*Audrey Horkoff, Past President, Agribition, Kamsack

The Honourable Clay Serby, Deputy Premier and Rural Development Minister

Business Development Subcommittee

*Florian Possberg, Chair, Employment Subcommittee, CEO, Big Sky, Humboldt

*Linda Pipke, Vice-Chair, Business Development Subcommittee, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Council for Community Development, Davidson

Everett Bear, Past Chief, Muskoday First Nation, Birch Hills

Colleen Bilokreli, 4-H Council, Yorkton

Joan Chase, Board Director, Saskatchewan Food Centre, Meota

Joan Corneil, Director, Economic Development, City of North Battleford

Ray Frehlick, Saskatchewan Chairman, Petroleum Services Association of Canada, Estevan

*Audrey Horkoff, ACRE Co-Chair, Past President, Agribition, Kamsack

Lorne Johnson, Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association representative, Mayor, Eston

Gene Kessler, Chairman, Family Farm Foundation of Canada, Pangman

Les Lindberg, Chair, Canadian Bankers Association, Regina

Wanda Wolf, Saskatchewan Herb and Spice Association, Phippen

Crown Land Subcommittee

*Brad Wildeman, Co-Chair, Crown Land Subcommittee, President, Pound-Maker Agventures Ltd., Lanigan

*Red Williams, Co-Chair, Crown Land Subcommittee, President, Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation, Saskatoon

Miles Anderson, Past President, Saskatchewan Livestock Association, Fir Mountain

Wayne Bacon, Director, Saskatchewan Canola Growers Association, Kinistino

Ray Bashutsky, President, Sask Rally Group, Wynyard

Neal Hardy, President, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, Hudson Bay

Lester Lafond, Agricultural Consultant, Saskatoon

Keith Lewis, Director, Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association, Wawota

Phil Reeves, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Mining Association, Regina

Thad Trefiak, Vice-President, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Leross

Brian Weedon, Past President, Saskatchewan Stockgrowers Association, Swift Current

Stewart Wells, President, National Farmers Union, Swift Current

Infrastructure Subcommittee

*Dick DeRyk, Chair, Entrepreneur, Yorkton

Dennis Banda, Federated Co-operatives Limited, Saskatoon

Gordon Lightfoot, President, Credit Union Central, Swift Current

*Guy Lonechild, Second Vice-Chief, FSIN, Saskatoon

Raquel Moleski, Saskatchewan Women's Agricultural Network, Ituna

Evan Ortynsky, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Yorkton

Darell Pack, Senior Policy Advisor, Rural Secretariat, Winnipeg

David Sloan, Past Chair, Saskatchewan Area Transportation Planning Committee Chairpersons Committee, Richardson

Jerry Wurz, Producer, Eagle Creek Colony, Asquith

Doug Griller, Bison Association, Quill Lake

Rural Employment Subcommittee

*Loren Katzenberger, Co-Chair, Past Chair, Prairie Implement Manufacturers' Association, Saskatoon

*Danea Armstrong Knittig, Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority, Saskatoon

Dr. Ernie Barber, Dean, College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

Germain Dauk, Past Chair, Pulse Canada, Naicam

Clay Dowling, Past President, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Saskatoon

Deborah Ehmann, Canadian Agriculture Safety Program Officer, Dundurn

Bert Harman, CEO Star Eggs, Saskatoon

George Lafond, Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

Faye Myers, CEO, Parkland Regional College, Melville

John Serhiekno, Agriculture in the Classroom, Blaine Lake

Hugh Wagner, Grain Services Union, Regina

Grace Whittington, Past President, Saskatchewan Food Processors Association, Saskatoon